

March 21, 2023

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR JANICE HAHN

Proclaim The Month of April as Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 44 children (2021) is diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). In California, the statistic is even narrower at 1 in 26 children. Chances are, many of us may know and love someone with ASD and other special needs. This motion designates April as Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month in alignment with the White House's proclamation and the United Nations' declaration of World Autism Awareness Day on April 2 as well as numerous global efforts and initiatives to raise ASD awareness, education, and inclusion.

Individuals with ASD are each unique and have a range of challenges, including social and communication (e.g., nonverbal or limited verbal) skills. For some individuals with ASD, lights and sirens can become overwhelming and overload their senses. Nearly half of those with autism may also wander or bolt from safety. Seeing a fully suited first responder or stranger can provide a sense of uneasiness. To help familiarize and expose individuals with ASD to first responders and mutually learn from one another on how to best approach someone with special needs, the Los Angeles County Fire Department (Department) created the award-winning *Sirens of Silence* program which launched in April 2021.

Promoting "Care Needs No Words", the *Sirens of Silence* program consists of three

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components: 1) **education and awareness** for the Department's fire and lifeguard personnel through a training module as well as access to a large library of visual aids and informational materials (available online to anyone at no cost and in a variety of languages) with advice and practical tips on how to best approach, respond, and communicate; 2) **special needs-friendly events** for residents to meet and interact with first responders in a welcoming and sensory-sensitive space; and 3) **safety-related items** (i.e., seatbelt covers, sensory toys, identification cards, window stickers/signs, etc.) for special needs patients available at fire stations, lifeguard towers, and on apparatus.

Since the program's initial launch and as it marks its two-year anniversary, the Department has continually updated and increased its resources and materials based upon community input; developed and cultivated partnerships with County departments, other first responder agencies, local theme parks, venues, and community organizations to provide safe, welcoming, and sensory-sensitive spaces as well as promote awareness, education, and inclusion of individuals with autism and other special needs; offered the program for adoption and implementation to outside agencies; and developed the training as a continuing education (CE) course.

Embracing all abilities and proud to be a supporter of autism and special needs awareness and inclusion, the Los Angeles County Fire Department is dedicated to enhancing and continuing its gold standard of delivering and providing meaningful and professional care and service to everyone.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors proclaim the month of April as “Autism Awareness and Acceptance Month” throughout Los Angeles County and, in doing so, urge all residents, city officials, as well as community groups, clubs and organizations to join this effort in promoting awareness and inclusion throughout all communities.

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JH: kc